

# FORT DECKER



236 YEARS  
AFTER THE BATTLE  
OF MINISINK

Fort Decker was built before 1760 by German immigrant Frederick Haynes. Frederick married Catherine Decker; their first child is said to have been born in the building. According to the Minisink Valley Dutch Reformed Church Records, Margaret was baptized in 1759. Frederick used the building as a trading post as well as his home. He and his family moved to a farm in Wantage, Sussex County, NJ about 1775. The building continued to be used as a fortified home for local residence to flee to when threatened by Indian attack.

In his second attack on the Minisink Region on July 20, 1779 Mohawk Indian, Joseph Brant and his Tory and Indian troops set fire to the building. Exactly what was left standing of this stone structure is unclear, but we do know that in 1793 it was either rebuilt or remodeled by Martinus Decker. This attack lead to the only major battle of the Revolutionary War in this area. The Battle of Minisink fought at Minisink Ford, New York on July 22, 1779 was a resounding loss for the local militia.

Most of the early history of the building has come from the pension applications of the militia

who served at the fort during the Revolution:

1. Martin Kuykendall's pension application states that he worked at a small fort called Fort Decker in 1777.
2. Benjamin Davis stated that he served at the stockade at Martinus Decker's settlement.
3. James Burt was "stationed a part of this time at a stockade of Martinus Decker's settlement."
4. William Knapp stated that he had served for weeks at "Martinus Decker's fort in Minisink."
5. Richard Clark describes part of his military service as being at "Martinus Decker's Fort"
6. Moses Knapp, stationed at the Fort in May 1779, said that during his time forty men were garrisoned there.

---

The following is a letter written by Joseph Brant to his superior officer Colonel Bolton, seven days after the battle. Reprinted here as it was written.

Oghwage - July 29<sup>th</sup> 1779

Sir/

I beg leave to acquaint you, that I arrived here last night from Minisink, and was a good deal disappointed that I cou'd not get into that place at the time I wished to do, a little before day; instead of which I did not arrive 'till noon, when all the Cattle was in the Woods so we cou'd get but a few of them. We

have burnt all the Settlement called Minisink, one Fort excepted, round which we lay before, about an hour, & had one man Killed & one wounded. We destroyed several small stockade Forts, and took four Scalps & three Prisoners; but did not in the least injure Women or Children. The reason that we cou'd not take more of them, was owing to the many Forts about the Place, into which they were always ready to run like ground Hogs. I left this place about 8 oClock next day, and marched 15 miles, there are two roads, one thro' the woods, the other alongside the River; we were coming up this road next morning, and I sent two men to examine the other road, the only way the Rebels cou'd come to attack us; these men found the Enemy's path not far from our Camp, & discovered they had got before to lay in ambush – The two Rascals were afraid when they saw the Path, and did not return to inform us, so that the Rebels had fair play at us. They fired on the Front of our People when crossing the River, I was then about 400 yards in the Rear, as soon as the Firing began I immediately marched up a Hill in their Rear with 40 men, & came round on their backs, the rest of my men were all scattered on the other side; however, the Rebels soon retreated and I pursued them, until they stopt upon a Rocky Hill, round which were employed & very busy, near four hours before we cou'd drive them out. We have taken 40 odd scalps, and one Prisoner, a Captain. I suppose the Enemy have lost near half of their men & most of their Officers; they all belonged to the Militia & were about 150 in number.

I am informed by the Prisoners, that the King's Troops had taken a Post below the Highlands on the north River, called King's Ferry, in which were 50 men, and had built a Fort on each side of the River: That after this Genl. Clinton sent a part of his army into New England, took several Towns, and destroyed a great deal of stores &c. – that Genl. Washington in the mean time sent part of his Army in the night & surprised





### *Thayendaneagea—Joseph Brant*

*His father died when his son was an infant. Joseph Brant, his English name, became a figure of distinction, a remarkable man. At 18 years of age, during the French and Indian War, Joseph joined other Mohawk warriors when they supported the British actions against the French in Canada. Brant fought with fierce determination against the Americans on the frontier and distinguished himself as one of their most courageous warriors and ablest strategists.*

one of his Forts, in which 500 men were taken Prisoners – this affair happened some time ago.

The night after we left Minisink, I received another piece of Intelligence that Genl. Clinton at the head of a great army was coming up the North River, and drove Genl. Washington and his army before him, and obligated him to retreat up the River in a hurry; this news I received from the Rebels, who also said the Country was extremely alarmed.

I find the Enemy certainly intends an expedition into the Indian Country, & have built strong Forts – by the last accounts they were at Wyoming, perhaps by this time they may be at Shimong, where I have sent my Party to remain 'till I join them; I am now setting off with 8 men to the Mohawk River, in order to discover the Enemy's motions.

In the last skirmish we had 8 men killed & 10 wounded. John the Mohawk dangerously wounded, and 8 more almost in as bad a situation – I am afraid they will not recover –

I am, Sir,

Your obedient Servant.

Joseph Brant

---

**Colonel John Hathorn's report to Governor George Clinton dated July 27, 1779, five days after the battle.**

Gov. Clinton:

Dear Sir—In conformity to the Military Law, I embrace this first opportunity to communicate to your excellency my proceedings on a late tour of duty with my regiment. On the evening of the 21st of this instant, I received an order from his excellency, Gen. Washington, together with a requisition of the commissary of prisoners, to furnish one hundred men of my regiment for to guard the British prisoners on their way to Easton, at the same time received an express from Minisink that the Indians were ravaging and burning the place.

I ordered three companies of my regiment, including the exempt company, to parade for the purpose of a guard. The other three companies to march immediately to Minisink. On the 22nd I arrived with a part of my people at Minisink, where I found Col. Tusten, of Goshen, and Maj. Meeker, of New Jersey, with parts of their regiments, who had marched with about eighty men up the river a few miles.

I joined this party with about forty men, the whole amounting to one hundred and twenty men, officers included. A spy came in and informed me the enemy lay about four hours before at Mongaup, six miles distant from us. Our people appeared in high spirits. We marched in pursuit with an intention either to fall on them by surprise or to gain in front and ambush them. We were soon informed that they were on their march up the river. I found it impracticable to surprise them on the ground that they now were and took my route along the old Kesheth-ton path. The Indians encamped at the mouth of Half-way Brook. We encamped at 12 o'clock at night at Skinner's saw mill, three miles and a half from the enemy, where we lay the remainder of the night. The mountains were so exceedingly rugged and high we could not possibly get at them as they had passed the grounds the most favorable for us to attack them on before we could overtake them. Skinner's is about eighteen miles from Minisink. At daylight on the morning of the 23rd, after leaving our horses and disengaging of everything heavy, we marched on with intention to make the attack the moment an opportunity offered. The Indians, probably from some discovery they had made of us, marched with more alacrity than usual with an intention to get their prisoners, cattle and plunder, taken at Minisink, over the river.

They almost effected getting their cattle and baggage across, when we discovered them at Lackawack, twenty-seven miles from Minisink, some Indians in the river and some had got over. It was determined in Council to make an attack at

this place.

I therefore disposed of the men into three divisions, ordered Col. Tusten to command the one on the right and to take post about three hundred yards distance on an eminence to secure our right; sent Col. Wisner with another division to file out to the left and to dispose of himself in the like manner. In order to prevent the enemy from gaining any advantage on our flank, the other division under my command to attack them with that vigor necessary to Strike Terror in such a foe.

Capt. Tyler with the advanced guard unhappily discharged his piece before the division could be properly posted, which put me under the necessity of bringing on the action. I ordered my division to fix bayonets and push forcibly on them, which order being resolutely executed, put the Indians in the utmost confusion, great numbers took to the river, who fell from the well directed fire of our riflemen, and incessant blaze from our musketry, without returning any fire. The divisions in the rear, not subject to order, broke some advancing down the hill toward me, others fled into the woods. I soon perceived the enemy's rally on our right and recrossing the river to gain the heights I found myself under the necessity to rally all my forces, which by this time was much less than I expected. The enemy by this time had collected in force and from the best accounts that can be collected received a reinforcement from Keshethon, began to fire on our left. We returned the fire and kept up a constant bush firing up the hill from the river, in which the brave Capt. Tyler fell; several were wounded. The people being exceedingly fatigued obliged me to take post on a height, which proved to be a strong and advantageous ground. The enemy repeatedly advanced in from forty to one hundred yards distance, and were as repeatedly repulsed.

I had now but forty-five men (officers included), who had lost their command naturally drew toward me. The Spirits of these few, notwithstanding their fatigue, situation, and unallay-



ing thirst, added to the cruel yelling of those bloody monsters, the seed of Anak in size, exceed thought or description. We defended this ground near three hours and a half, during the whole time one blaze without intermission was kept up on both sides. Here we had three men killed and nine wounded. Among the wounded was Lt-Col Tusten, in the hand; Maj. Meeker in the shoulder, Adj. Finch in the leg, Capt. Jones in the foot and Ensign Wood in the wrist. The chief of our people was wounded by angle shots from the Indians from behind rocks and trees.

Our rifles here were very useful. I found myself under the necessity of ceasing the fire, our ammunition from the continual fire of more than five hours naturally suggested that it must be exhausted, ordered no person to shoot without having his object sure, and that no shot be lost.

This gave spirits to the enemy, who formed their whole strength and forced the northeast part of our lines. Here we gave them a severe Gaul. Our people not being able to support the lines, retreated down the hill, precipitately toward the river. The enemy kept up a constant fire on our right, which was returned.

The people by this time were so scattered I found myself unequal to rally them again. Consequently every man made choice of his own way. Thus ended the action.

The following are missing in the whole from the last accounts: Col. Ellison's Regiment—Lt-Col Tusten, Capt. Jones, Capt. Wood, Capt. Little, Capt. Duncan and twelve privates. One private of New Jersey, Adj. Finch, Ensign Wood and one private of my regiment. In the whole twenty-one men.

Several wounded men are in. I hope others will yet be found. I received a wound on my head, one in my leg and one in my thigh-slightly. The one in my thigh from inattention is a little troublesome.

Several spies that lay near the enemy the night following

the action, informed us that they moved off their wounded in canoes on the day following; that on the ground where they lay there was great quantities of blood, and the whole encampment was marked with wounded men. Great numbers of plasters and bloody rags was found. Although we suffered by the loss of so many brave men, the best for the number without sensible error in the precinct. It's beyond doubt the enemy suffered much more. From the various parts of the action can be collected a greater number of Indian dead than we lost, besides their wounded. The number of Indians and Tories is not ascertained; some accounts say 90, others 120, others 160.

Col. Seward, of New Jersey, with 93 men was within five or six miles of the action on the Pennsylvania side, did not hear the firing, approached and lay near the Indians all night following, and from their conduct and groaning of the wounded gave rise to the belief that they had been in some action where they had suffered, and would have attacked them around their fire, but a muting arose among some of his people which prevented a very unfortunate and to be lamented circumstance. If in their situation he had attacked them, with the common smiles of Providence, he must have succeeded and put them to total rout.

Dear Governor, it's not in my power to point out to you the disagreeable situation I was in, surrounded by a foe, with such a handful of valuable men, not only as soldiers but as fellow citizens and members of society, and nothing to be expected but the hatched, spear and scalping-knife. The tremendous yells and whoops, all the fiends in the confines of the Infernal Region, with one united cry, could not exceed it. Add to this the cries and petitions of the wounded around me, not to leave them, was beyond paralled or idea. My heart bleeds for the unfortunate wounded who fell into their hands. However circumstances give me a little consolation. Mr. Roger Townsend, of Goshen, received a wound in his thigh, being exceedingly

thirsty making an attempt to go to find some water was met by an Indian who very friendly took him by the hand and said he was his prisoner and would not hurt him. A well directed ball from one of our men put the Indian into a dose, and Mr. Townsend ran back into the lines. I hope some little humanity may yet be found in the breasts of the Savages.

I should be at the greatest loss was I to attempt to point out any officer or soldier that exceeded another in bravery during the time of the general action. Too much praise cannot be given to them for their attention in receiving orders and alacrity in executing them.

I have acquiesced with Col. Woodhull in ordering one-eighth of our regiments to Minisink as a temporary guard until your excellency's pleasure is known on the subject.

The Indians were under the command of Brant, who was either killed or wounded in the action. They burnt Major Decker's house and barn; Sam'l Davis's barn and mill; Jacob Van Vleck's house and barn; Dan'l Van Okers barn (here was two Indians killed from a little fort around the house which was saved); Esquire Kuykindall's house and barn; Simon Westfall's house and barn; the Church; Peter Kuykindall's house and barn; Mertinus Decker's fort, house, barn and saw mills, and Nehemiah Patterson's saw mill; killed and scalped Jeremiah Vanoker, Daniel Cole, Ephraim Ferguson and one Tavern, and took with them several prisoners, mostly children, with a great number of horses, cattle and valuable plunder. Some of the cattle we rescued and returned to the owners.

I hope your excellency will make allowances for the imperfect stile, razures and blots of this line, whilst I have the honor to subscribe myself, with the most perfect esteem, in haste,

Your Excellency's Most Obedt. Sevt.,

John Hathorn, Col.

In 192<sup>11</sup>~~2~~, Minisink Valley Historical Society purchased portions of land that were the site of the Battle of Minisink Ford. This purchase saved the battlefield site from being quarried and lost forever.

**Minisink Battlefield  
Town of Highland  
Sullivan County, New York**

**December 21, 1910 - Recorded January 14, 1911 –  
Liber 163- page 565.**

\$125.00 - MVHS purchased from Rialto Construction Co. 4 ½ acres beginning in the line between lots 16 and 17 in the seventh division of the Minisink Patent. Rialto Construction Co purchased 50 acres altogether.

**February 20, 1911 – Recorded February 25, 1911 –  
Liber 164 – page 179.**

\$ 50.00 MVHS purchased from Mary J. Bartle 1½ acres of land being part of Lot No. 17 in the Seventh Division of the Minisink Patent. Mary J. Bartle purchased twenty eight acres and 71/100 of an acre on December 10, 1875 from H. B. Twichell & Wife.



However the location of the battlefield proved to be a hardship for the society to maintain, so the society deeded the site to Sullivan County.

### **Battlefield Gifted to Sullivan County by MVHS**

In a proceeding in the County Court of Sullivan County, New York, entitled “In the matter of the application of Minisink Valley Historical Society for leave to convey real property”, an order was duly made and entered in the office of the Clerk of said County of Sullivan on the **15 day of April 1955**, “authorizing the party of the first part to convey to the party of the second part the real property here after described, without consideration as a gift.” Deed signed by President Eva W. Terwilliger & Frederica Barkman, Secretary of the Society.

There is a clause in the deed stating that if at any time the party of the second part fails to observe the conditions of the transfer, the property will revert to the party of the first part.

*Note: The citizens of Sullivan County immediately started to raise funds to purchase an additional 12 acres. Today the park consists of 57 acres.*

Every year a commemoration service is held at the site to honor the men who fought in the battle.

In 1929, two plaques depicting the events of the battle were donated to the society by the artist George Beck. The plaque displayed here is called Minisink Massacre.



Battle of Minisink Sculpture by George Beck titled "Minisink Battle Massacre" - Highland, Sullivan County, NY"

## The Heroic Dead

---

Col. Benjamin Tusten  
Captain Bazaleel Tyler  
Captain Samuel Jones  
Captain John Little  
Captain John Duncan  
Captain Benjamin Vail  
Lieutenant John Wood  
Adjutant Nathaniel Finch  
Ens. Ephraim Mastin  
Ens. Ephraim Middaugh  
Gabriel Wisner  
Stephen Mead  
Matthias Terwilliger  
Joshua Lockwood  
Ephraim Forgerson  
Roger Townsend  
Samuel Knapp  
James Knapp  
Benjamin Bennett  
William Barker  
Jonathan Pierce  
James Little  
Timothy Barber

Joseph Norris  
Gilbert T. Vail  
Abraham Shepherd  
Joel Decker  
Nathan Wade  
Simon Wait  
Daniel Talmadge  
Jacob Dunning  
John Carpenter  
David Barney  
Jonathan Haskell  
Abraham Williams  
James Mosher  
Isaac Ward  
Baltus Nierpos  
Gamaliel Bailey  
Moses Thomas  
Eleazer Owens  
Adam Emblar  
Samuel Little  
Benjamin Dunning  
Daniel Reed  
Joseph Rider

Fort Decker

Is Open

The Last Saturday of the Month

From May through October

1:00—4:00 PM